

Unit 9c: Chinese Religious Texts-- Societal Implications

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

Be aware of the following

- The impact of the virtues Jen, Chun-tzu, Li and Wen on Confucian ethics
- Popularity of the Tao-te Ching (Lao-tzu)
- Wu-wei, the Taoist ethical ideal

Identify

- The Five Classics
- The Four Books
- Analects
- Meng Tzu
- Tao-te Ching
- Lao-tzu

Realize

- Importance of community and family within Confucian ethics
- Importance of the good life as a Taoist ideal

Chinese Religious Texts--Societal Implications

"It is these ethics which even today we meet all over East Asia."

-- Hans Steinger ("Religions in China") in Ways to the Center, p. 170.

1. Confucian Texts

a. The Five Classics

(1) **I-ching** (ee-jing--"Book of Changes") The complementary and conflicting interactions of Yin and Yang energies describe the universe. Hidden interpretation, technique based on the study of members and ethical insights are all described. Constant self-exertion, inspired by the harmony and creativity of the universe, is necessary for wise persons.



(2) **Shu-ching** (shoo-jing--"Book of History/Documents") This text compiles historical documents of the ninth to sixth centuries, B.C. It describes the political vision of Confucian thought, outlining an ethical foundation for humane government.

(3) **Shih-ching** (shuhr-jing--"Book of Poetry/Songs") Common human feelings, expressed in some 300 poems and religious hymns from the early Chou Dynasty (1027-402 B.C.), comprise the Shih-ching.

(4) **Li chi** (lee-jee--"Book of Rites") Consciousness of duty pervades the ceremonial rituals collected in Li chi.



A cooperative society,
organized by four principle
occupations--scholar, farmer,
artisan, merchant--is the ideal.

(5) **Ch'un-ch'iu** (chuhn chyoh--"Spring and Autumn Annals") This text emphasizes history and the significance of the collective memory in individual and societal identification.

b. The Four Books Chu Hsi (joo-shee--A.D. 1130-1200) emphasized the Four Books. Two chapters, originally from the Li-chi, comprise books one and two of the four Books (the Ta-hsueh [great learning] and Chung Yung [Doctrine of the Mean].) The Lun Yu (luhn yoo--Discussed Sayings) is known to most Western audiences as the Analects (AN ehlekts) or recorded actions and saying of Confucius.

Most of the twenty Analects books describe Confucius as he answers questions, discusses issues and lives his beliefs. The Meng Tzu (mung dzuh) by Mencius (MEN shee ahs) systematized Confucian teaching, advocating study of the Classics, practicing moral disciplines and developing natural ying/yang energies.

2. Confucian Ethics The question, "What is the character of the social life Confucian education should engender?", addresses the ethical center of Confucianism.



Historian of world religions, Huston Smith, specifies the following four terms which designate this heart of the Confucian ethical tradition. Jen (ruhn), chun-tzu (juhn-dyuh), li (lee) and wen alike are ethical/motivational topics, influential in the

folk/Confucian tradition of the family, government bureaucracy, and village life especially.

a. Jen (ruhn) This basic virtue, as outlined in the Analects, signifies benevolence, humaneness and human-heartedness. Cultivating courtesy and unselfishness promotes the dignity of human life wherever it appears. Public displays focus upon diligence, steadfastness, and a magnanimity of heart which pursues a mission, that of redeeming the world through human effort.

This sense of mission makes the world safer and more livable, improves the quality of life, and transforms society into a moral community. Jen is not only a humanistic objective, but also a profoundly spiritual goal of Confucian ethics.

b. Chun-tzu (juhn-dyuh)

This term refers to the mature, cultivated, humane person. It is the opposite of petty, mean-spirited individuals. A chun-tzu person aims to live by the highest of ethical standards. He/she seeks to answer, by action and attitude, the question "what can I do to accommodate others?"

c. Li (lee--ritual, mores, ceremony)

Li finds its origin in religious ceremony and rite. Its broader meaning describes the way things are done. Attitude becomes as important as correct conduct. Manners, an order to behavior and family relations, honoring elders, and the concept of the golden mean, all describe Li.



The family, still the single most important social institution in imparting ways of learning to be human, is the framework for establishing graceful interactions with others. It is the glue for social solidarity.

Filial piety--relations encompassing not only children to their parents but generations to each other--is the underpinning for all other interactions. Cultivation of genuine feelings for parents and siblings--rather than estrangement and alienation between them--is the principle.

This family/communal orientation also plays itself out in salvation schemes. Individualistic approaches are frowned upon. Family, society, country or the whole world must be included in such appeals.

We see the depths of family devotion in death and grieving practices. After a parent dies, the child (son) may retire from public affairs, simplify living arrangements and devote himself to grieving for as long as three years.

Li further expresses itself through the five relationships. Father-son, ruler-minister, husband-wife, old-young, and friend-friend bonds and practices are not only critical to a well-ordered society but provide a training ground for the effective development of a humane, flourishing soul.

Critics sometimes describe the "three bonds"--ruler over minister, father over son and husband over wife--as promoting despotic, autocratic, patriarchal, and male-chauvinistic practice. A Confucian response sees these bonds not as confining or limiting practices. Rather, when seen from a broader perspective, the patterns of social stability, maintenance of the social order, and a world at peace overcome particular frustrations of such hierarchical relations.



d. Wen refers to the "arts of peace"--music, art, poetry, the aesthetic and spiritual aptitudes. The mark of a cultured person is the knowledge and appreciation of culture, breeding, and grace.

The Analects record: *"By poetry the mind is aroused; from music the finish is received. The odes stimulate the mind. They induce self-contemplation. They teach the art of sensibility. They help to restrain resentment. They bring home the duty of serving one's parents and one's prince."* (XVIII:9)

3. Taoist Texts

"He who stands on tiptoe doesn't stand firm. He who rushes ahead doesn't go far. He who tries to shine dims his own light."

-- Tao Te Ching, chap. 24.

The Tao-tsang (dou-dzhang---Repository of the Tao) is the most comprehensive of Taoist texts. Written in priestly language, often meant to be understood by only the knowledgeable, it is difficult to translate and comprehend. During the Ming dynasty, the massive Tao-tsang comprised 1,120 thread bound volumes and 1,476 titles.

The Tao-te ching (dow-duh jing--Book of the Way and Its Power) is the earliest rendering of Taoist thought. Also called the Lao-tzu (lou dyuh, after its commonly understood author), the Tao-te ching is the most widely translated Chinese classic.

Concerning the legendary formulation of the Tao-te ching, the following is instructive:

"At the end of his life, Lao-tzu is said to have climbed on a water buffalo and ridden west towards what is now Tibet, in search of solitude for his last few years.



On the way, he was asked to leave behind a record of his beliefs. The product was a slim volume of only 5,000 characters, the Tao-te ching or The Way and its Power. He then rode off on his buffalo." (Lonely Planet Survival Kit--China, p. 63.)

4. Taoist Ethical Themes

a. Wu-wei (woo-way) This term describes the Taoist ethical ideal.

One follows the natural course of things (The Tao), going with the flow and allowing others to do so as well. Wu-wei restricts human action. When tempted to engage in a frenzied pace, become involved in a flurry of activities, or run from one excited project to the next, wu-wei encourages serenity and a fasting of the spirit.

b. The Good Life The Taoist ideal, the good life, is a community living a natural, harmonious, simple life without the pressures of war and competition. "Being" not "having" becomes the enlightened style of life.

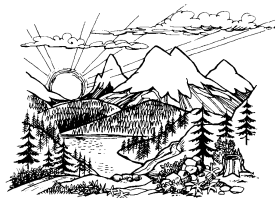
Contented individuals, simple, whole and alert possess the necessary leisure to engage in a life of harmony with others and with nature. The result is a sense of personal spontaneity ('tzu-jan' [dzuh-rahm], spontaneity, nature, naturalness) which comes from within, in concert with the ebb and flow of nature itself.



Other personal traits within the tradition include reverent humility, and an avoidance of strident, aggressive behavior with others and nature. Selflessness, cleanliness and emotional calm characterize the fulfilled individual.

World religion scholar Huston Smith describes implications of the way Taoism seeks attunement with nature. After the British had climbed Mt. Everest (the "conquest of Everest")...*"D.T. Suzuki remarked: 'We Orientals would have spoken of befriending Everest.' The Japanese team that scaled Anapurna, the second highest peak, climbed to within 50 feet of the summit and deliberately stopped, provoking a Western mountaineer to exclaim in disbelief, 'That's class!'"* (The World's Religions, pp. 212-213.)

Nature is to be befriended rather than conquered. In remaining attuned with nature, Taoist thought served as an early precursor to the ecological/environmental movement. *"Those who would take over the earth and shape it to their will never, I notice, succeed. The earth is like a vessel so sacred that at the mere approach of the profane it is marred and when they reach out their fingers it is gone."* (Tao Te Ching, ch. 29.)



Vocabulary List: Chinese Religious Texts-- Societal Implications

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Review Quiz: Chinese Religious Texts--Societal Implications



Part 1--Multiple Choice Place the letter of the most correct response in the blank provided.

1. _____ Taoist practice desires nature to be
 - a. conquered.
 - b. befriended.
 - c. forsaken.
2. _____ For a Taoist, the good life advocates a society which
 - a. lives for the moment and discourages future planning.
 - b. follows a harmonious, simple life free of war and competition.
 - c. promotes acquisition of material goods and status.
3. _____ Personal spontaneity, in concert with the ebb and flow of nature, is an attribute of which religious/philosophical practice?
 - a. Buddhism
 - b. Hinduism
 - c. Taoism
4. _____ Following the natural course of things describes the term
 - a. Wu-wei.
 - b. Jen.
 - c. Karma.
5. _____ The most widely translated Chinese classic text is the
 - a. Little Red Book.
 - b. Analects.
 - c. Tao-te Ching.

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6. _____ The term "wen" refers to the arts of
- a. war--saber fighting and battle maxims.
 - b. peace--music, art, poetry and the spiritual dimension.
 - c. religion--rituals for temples and monasteries.
7. _____ In Confucian thought, the five relationships (father-son, ruler-minister, husband-wife, old-young and friend-friend) are important
- a. for promoting the equality of all.
 - b. in managing a well-ordered society and flourishing soul.
 - c. in preserving the Mandarin language.
8. _____ The concept which originated in religious ceremony and rite, and now describes the way things are done, is the
- a. Tao.
 - b. Li.
 - c. Chun-tzu.
9. _____ The Chun-tzu person seeks to answer, by attitude and action, the question
- a. "what can I do to further meditation practice?"
 - b. "what is life?"
 - c. "what can I do to accommodate others?"
10. _____ Within Confucian thought, the family is
- a. the glue which holds society together.
 - b. important, but not as critical as good government.
 - c. secondary to salvation schemes which focus on the individual.

Part 2--True or False Place a T or an F in the blank provided.



1. _____ The Li chi (Book of Rites) describes cooperative Chinese society organized around the four occupations of scholar, farmer, artisan and merchant.
2. _____ Confucian grieving practices see eldest sons as purposefully mourning the loss of a parent for as long as three years.
3. _____ Confucian thought sees the three bonds--ruler over minister, father over son and husband over wife--as confining, limiting and despotic practices.
4. _____ The term "Li" describes the basic Confucian virtue of human heartedness and cultivation of a humane spirit.
5. _____ The Sun Tzu is another title for the recorded actions and sayings of Confucius.
6. _____ Sun Yat-sen systematized Confucian thought and advocated study of the Chinese classics and practice of moral disciplines.
7. _____ Some scholars see Confucian ethics as applying, in part, to all of East Asia.
8. _____ The ethical center of Confucian practice centers on education for a particular type of social life.
9. _____ Confucian practice places great importance upon the individual rather than the family.
10. _____ The five relationships are seen by many to promote male/female equality.



"Let off some steam."

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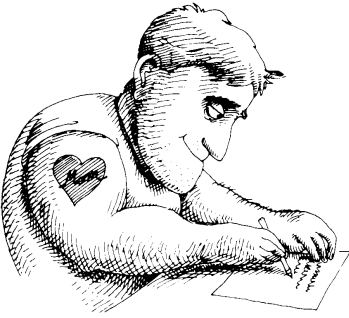
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"It is not the dangerous days of battle which most strongly test the soldier's resolution, but the years of peace, when many voices, offering many counsels, bewilder and confound him [her]."
(General Matthew Ridgway)

